

Third Sunday in Lent
March 24, 2019

Text: Luke 13:1-9

Theme: "Toppling Towers"

Towers have a long history. They have served as observation places, safe places, and space places. In our OT lesson God tells Ezekiel (for the second time) that He has made him a watchman. A watchman could do his watching from a watchtower. It was a high place from which one could see what was going on and call out warning as necessary. Ezekiel was doing his watching from the tower of God's Word. In ancient cities towers could be built into the city walls. It was part of the fortification. Here was a safe place from the assault of the attacker and a place from which to shower down destruction on the enemy. Today towers are often space places, a configuration to produce a lot of useable space on smaller areas of land. In any case a good foundation is needed so the tower does not topple over.

In our text Jesus speaks of a tower. It's part of His answer to those who had come to report to Him a tragedy. He points them to a greater tragedy, at least an impending one and also a preventable one. It is a call to repentance.

Some tragedy tellers come to Jesus. They do so "at that time." What time is this? Well, it's a time of much teaching. It's past the time Jesus has set His face to go to Jerusalem. From 10:22-13:9 we have all teaching, no miracles recorded. It is a time of crowds coming to hear Jesus (12:54). So, at this time of that time some of those present have something to report to Jesus. They "told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifice." (v. 1) We don't know any more about this event than what we have here. These Galileans were going up to Jerusalem for a good thing, to offer

sacrifice and a very bad thing happens. They become the sacrifice at Pilate's orders. Why does he order such? We don't know. Were they perceived to be part of some sort of a rebellion? They tell this to Jesus. Likely they were looking for his take on this matter. What insight did he have to give? Maybe they thought his insight would agree with their conclusions on the matter. It's good to hear your convictions affirmed, especially by one who teaches with authority. Was it so with these tragedy tellers?

There are tawdry tattlers around, no shortage. It could be one of us. "Did you hear what happened to Bill? He lost his job, no warning, just boom, gone!" "You won't believe what happened to Ernest—remember him? He was the pastor of Grace Lutheran over in Splagna. He had been there for years, but he's not there anymore." "It's a shock to learn that Bernice left Brent. They have been married for 25 years." And then maybe there is the assessment. "From what I know of Bill, he may have just been lining his pockets. His creative expense account recording caught up with him." "Ernest really wasn't much of a pastor. He was a bit on the lazy side and maybe he showed too much interest in certain people if you know what I mean." "Bernice may have been tired of his just not being around. Maybe she checked his messages to see what he had been up to."

So, the tales are told, maybe as fact, and it's a way to build ourselves up, so we think. We can see why what happened to them happened to them. It's not really a surprise. The facade has come crashing down. Talk of the toppling of their towers, maybe we don't soon grow tired of it.

So, Jesus responds to the tellers. 'Did they think that going up to Jerusalem was a great show, but one that God could easily see through? God let them have it. Makes sense to us.' Jesus answer, "Do you think these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans...No, I tell you; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." (vs 2, 3) Jesus

goes on to topple any false assessment with the story of a toppled tower. ‘While we are talking about sudden, unexpected destruction—“Those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem?” (v. 4) “No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” You are not so outstanding or upstanding as you may suppose.

What is the quality of towers we would build of self-righteousness or justification? ‘Quaky,’ is a good assessment. “Let anyone who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall.” (1 Corinthians 10:12) ‘I’ve got this, I can handle this, I’ll be okay, I can handle the heat.’ ‘I’ve got a pretty good track record. Anyone can see that. Yes, there are few stumbles along here and there, and, oh, that’s right, that hard fall recently, but if you take a look at my whole body of work...’ “I’ve made some bad choices, hurt a few people, I know, but really, I’m a good person. My tower may be okay.”

After His words about Galileans and crushed citizens of Jerusalem, Jesus adds some more food for thought. He tells a story about a fig tree. A certain landowner had planted a fig tree in his vineyard. No, it was not part of fig grove, it was out there all by itself in the vineyard. Maybe it fit nicely in a space there. The landowner came to this fig tree expecting to find, you guessed it, figs. But all he found was leaves. He says he has been coming for three years looking for figs. This could be an allusion to Jesus’ three years of ministry seeking to find the fruit of repentance and faith, but He wasn’t finding what He was looking for, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not (13:24).” So, the landowner does not find the sought for fruit. He’s tired of it. ‘Cut it down, why should it take up space.’ It’s a waste of a good piece of land.

But the vinedresser intercedes, asks for more time. He has a plan of action. Give me, give it another year. I'll dig around it and throw in the fertilizer and we'll see what happens. It is a limited time offer. If it bears fruit, good, if not, then it's the ax to the roots.

Limited time, offer, only so much time to come to repentance and faith. God's law is like a huge boulder that crashes wobbly towers. Jesus uses the crusher in our text. It is not a question of why them, or why me, but really a question of 'why not me.' 'It should be me.' No one is righteous before God, not those considered to be the worst of sinners, and not those supposing themselves to be quite righteous. Our towers of self are toppled.

Jesus could have crushed at any moment. He had the hammer of His Word that flowed from the hammer of His Being. In the garden when Peter will draw his puny sword, Jesus tells him to put it away, 'Don't you think I could ask my Father and He would send more than 12 legions of angels?' (Matthew 26:53) But He didn't really need all those angels, not even one. 'God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.' (John 3:17)

Crushed stone, that's what they wanted to make Jesus. He was the stone the builders rejected. The leadership did not much care for the digging of the law in their lives and the message of redemption in Jesus. They were tenants, tenants who wanted to usurp ownership. So, kill the prophets and stone those sent to them and then kill the Son. They cast Him out. Will it not be business as usual? He was nailed to a cross. Lifted up on the horrible thing as He ought to be. Yes, it was a hard thing, a gruesome thing, but even a good and righteous thing in the overall picture.

Yes, they wanted to make Jesus crushed stone, but turns out He's the crushing stone. "Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it

will crush him.” (Luke 20:18) But He’s more than the crushing stone. He’s the Cornerstone (Luke 20:17) Our own tower of righteousness is shown to be the garbage it is. The totally Righteous One is exposed there for us on the cross as He bears all our unrighteousness. He is rejected, cast out, but now He is risen and reigns.

We are built on Him, not He on us! We are not the support. We are living stones built together to be a holy temple for. For us it is from trash to treasure. It’s not about our showmanship, but His workmanship. Our faulty towers are toppled and we come to Him, built on Him to bear fruit, fruit that follows repentance. There is first time repentance and daily repentance. By first time I mean that which leads from death to life, being grafted into the Vine and become fruitful. It is a limited time offer. There are only so many days within which to come to grafted in. There is daily repentance for those already in the Vine, the pruning which leads to more fruitfulness. It too is a limited time offer. There are only so many days to bear fruit for our Lord.

We can begin to grow calloused about our sin as though it is no big deal, but it is! Look at the severity of the restoration. We are new creations in Jesus. We repent of our casual attitude toward sin, of perhaps seeing Jesus as the fix for the fire so we can live for the flame of the passion. In Him we do bear fruit, the fruit of faithfulness, the fruit of the right thing, the fruit of service, and the fruit of witness to our Lord.

Our self-constructed towers are crushed not for our ultimate destruction, but for our rebuilding into God’s temple. For Jesus’ sake. Amen